

## Congressman Rothman Offers Legislation to Aid First Responders and Local Taxpayers

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Washington, DC &ndash; On July 13, 2011, Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ), a member of the House Appropriations Committee, offered an amendment to the Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies 2012 Appropriations Bill. The legislation would have provided \$85 million in much needed aid for our nation's first responders and local taxpayers. The amendment failed to pass due to the opposition of the Republican majority of the subcommittee.

Immediately following the horrific September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the capacity of our nation's radio and communications networks were overwhelmed. As family members tried to get in touch with and locate loved ones, there were too many calls for our nation's communications networks to handle. This not only meant despair for individuals looking for family members, but it also meant that first responders were not able to coordinate or communicate their efforts to save lives and respond effectively.

This problem was identified by Congress in the "Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007," which included provisions to ensure that America's first responders are able to communicate with each other during emergencies. The Act provided the FCC (Federal Communications Commission) with the tools to address this problem by upgrading a certain part of the communications network specifically designated for use by first responders. This designation is called the "narrowband mandate" and would ensure that first responders are able to communicate during emergencies by using special portions of the communications network. This unfunded federal mandate requires that the radio and communications equipment of America's first responders be upgraded by January 1, 2013.

“While the intention of the FCC’s narrowband mandate for the radio and communications equipment of first responders was good, it created unforeseen and expensive consequences. Our local taxpayers have been unfairly stuck with the costs of these equipment upgrades,” said Congressman Rothman. “This unfunded federal mandate may force already overburdened local taxpayers to finance these essential upgrades for their local first responders in order to fulfill this federal requirement. Otherwise, more than 18,000 police departments, more than 26,000 fire departments, and millions of first responders across the country will be left with radio and communications equipment that will not work correctly during an emergency.”

“My legislation called for \$85 million to have been transferred from a \$3.05 billion catch-all NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) account to pay for new emergency radios and communications equipment, starting October 1, 2011 – so that local taxpayers aren’t unfairly left with the full cost of this unfunded federal mandate. I asked the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies to make a choice: did the subcommittee members believe it was more important to fully fund an unspecified NASA account or to force local taxpayers to pay for this mandate and ensure that first responders across America – and in their districts – are equipped to do their job?” said Congressman Rothman.

The total amount of money needed to replace the radios for our nation’s first responders is estimated to be hundreds of millions of dollars. Because this program was eliminated this year, zero dollars were provided by the Congress in 2011 to address this cost. \$170 million was provided by the Congress in 2010, \$187 million was provided by the Congress in 2009, and \$205 million was provided by the Congress in 2008.

“While I am deeply disappointed that these Republicans opposed my amendment, I continue to look for other ways and Congressional partners to help me get local first responders, and the local property taxpayers who pay for their equipment, the funds they need to meet this unfunded federal mandate and to purchase these radios and other communications devices,” said Congressman Rothman.

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